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India

INDIA

After the War—In India

*After
The
War
Series*

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AFTER THE WAR—IN INDIA

India was singularly peaceful during the whole period of the war. She joined heartily with Great Britain in the common effort against the enemy, sending forth from her shores about one million men, and providing a war loan of over \$500,000,000. It is true, revolutionary societies were still at work in the dark, but the Criminal Investigation Department of Government was alert. In general a good spirit prevailed, which was greatly increased by the parliamentary proclamation of August 20, 1917, announcing "responsible government," that is, Home Rule for India, as a goal to be gradually realized. Soon the Montague-Chelmsford scheme was published, which awakened throughout the country a very warm debate. The great body of Moderates appreciated the scheme and proposed only amendments here and there. The Extremists, however, rejected the plan as utterly unsuitable, claiming not only that India is already fit for complete self-rule, but also that she should herself frame the terms of her own government.

In the meantime the Rowlatt Committee had been appointed to make a thorough investigation of the revolutionary activities during the last twenty-five years, and to suggest suitable legislation to enable Government more adequately to cope with such activities. On the basis of the Rowlatt Committee's report, an act entitled, "The Anarchical and Revolutionary and Crimes Act of 1919," was passed. There was very strong opposition to the Act on the part of the Indian members of the Imperial Legislative Council, whether Moderates or Extremists.

The Act was passed, and then behold! Mr. M. K. Gandhi, an Indian patriot of high character, headed the opposition.

There had been formed the Satyagraha movement, a kind of Indian "Solemn League and Covenant." The covenanters took a pledge of which the following is the gist: "We solemnly affirm that in the event of these Bills becoming law, and until they are withdrawn, we will refuse civilly to obey these laws; and we further affirm that in this struggle we will faithfully follow truth (hence the name Satyagraha—'truth-acceptance') and refrain from violence to life, person and property." In an address at Bombay on the 15th of March, Mr. Gandhi said: "The pledge is no small thing. It means a change of heart. It is an attempt to introduce the religious spirit into politics. We must no longer believe in the doctrine of tit for tat. We must not meet hatred by hatred, violence by violence, evil by evil, but we have to make a persistent effort to return good for evil." The irony of the situation is that in following the leadership of a man holding such sentiments, worse disturbances have taken place in India than at any time since the Mutiny of 1857.

April 6, 1919, was proclaimed a day of "passive resistance," to be spent in fasting, processions and prayer. In most places throughout India Mr. Gandhi's program was peacefully carried out. Had the Indian people all been of the type and character of Mr. Gandhi, there would have been no disturbance, but only a protest against the Bill, of the nature partly of a "strike" and partly of a religious ceremonial. Mr. Gandhi had not sufficiently considered the existence of a baser element in the population and the general illiteracy and religious inflammability of the people.

It was in the Punjab, the land of fighters, that the worst outbreaks took place—at Delhi, Amritsar, Kasur, Gujranwala, Lahore.

At Delhi the clash came almost by accident. A Hindu at the railway station was not fasting the 31st of March (Satyagraha Day), but was selling sweetmeats. So, quite after the style of strikers, a band went to dissuade him from work, peaceably if possible, but at any rate to dissuade him. He refused, and the station staff supported him. There was a clash between the mob and the police, which developed into a dangerous riot. Similar disturbances occurred in many other places.

From a letter dated Lahore, April 25th, recently received from Dr. J. C. R. Ewing, C.I.E., Secretary of the Council of the American Presbyterian Missions in India, the following very graphic statement is quoted:

"In Lahore things passed off with a fair degree of quietness, but the crowd was refused permission to march through the Civil Station beyond the Commercial Buildings. Following this, Mr. Gandhi was stopped in his progress toward Delhi and sent back to Bombay, and the news of his arrest created great excitement. On that day a terrible outbreak took place in Amritsar, where four Europeans were killed and a number of persons very roughly used, including a missionary lady of the C. M. S. Before order could be restored there, very severe action was taken by the military.

"On the 10th of April a huge procession was formed and came out from Lahore City, made up of two classes of people: first, those who were largely bent still upon passive resistance; and, second, by a great mass who had unquestionably allied themselves to the crowd for sinister purposes. This mob was stopped between the Forman College and the Chief Court, and a number

of persons were shot. Almost simultaneously with this, there was a serious outbreak at Kasur, where two soldiers were pulled from a train, one of whom was killed and the other so seriously injured that he died. An Englishman and his wife were saved only by special heroism on the part of an old student of Forman College.

On May 22nd Dr. Ewing writes again:

"Had anyone told me two months ago that conditions, such as existed in the Punjab from April 6th to April 20th, could possibly ever be found in that Province, I would have ridiculed the idea. In fact, I believe that the great majority of Indian people were just as much surprised as were Europeans and Americans. A fine old Sikh officer put the matter to me in this way as I traveled with him on the train: 'We in the Punjab did great things in the war and expected something tangible in the way of reward for patriotism. Instead of that we were told that Government had enacted a Bill according to which (1) no company of more than four in number could ever assemble, or if so, the Police would have full authority to shoot them down; (2) no wedding or funeral could take place without an initial payment of Rs. 5 tax to Government, and then in the presence of not more than 4 people; (3) the farmer would not dare to harvest his wheat until a Government representative had come and taken away the one-half.' The masses of the people hearing all these things accepted them at the mouth of their leaders, and said, not unnaturally: 'It is better to die than to live in such conditions.'"

How shall we account for these disturb-

ances in the Punjab? While the exciting cause was doubtless antagonism to the Rowlatt legislation, there were numerous predisposing causes which must be taken into account in any just view. The Punjab furnished during the war about 350,000 fighting men. Many of these were killed in the war or came home wounded. Thus the strain of war was felt throughout the whole Province. Then there was the economic difficulty—most serious of all—famine prices everywhere, due generally to the war and especially to the failure of the rains in 1918. Pestilence in the form of influenza struck India with frightful force, and accounted for about 6,000,000 deaths in the whole of India. Thus war, famine and pestilence all combined to work havoc, and the natural result of the suffering and privations involved was a somewhat nervous and suspicious temper. It is easy to be “agin the Government” when things are not going well. Then is when the agitator has his chance. When the situation was already somewhat abnormal, the agitation over the Rowlatt Bill began. It was the Rowlatt Bill, not in isolation, but set in a context of attending circumstances, which may be fairly regarded as the cause of the outbreak.

We must remember, too, that the last few months after the close of the war have witnessed unrest and disturbances in many parts of the world—bomb-throwing here in America on the part of the “Reds,” riots in Egypt, unrest in Chosen, the Sinn Feiner agitation in Ireland, and the Bolshevik activities in Russia. The Peace Conference has suggested from time to time pregnant thoughts, such as “the rights of subject peoples,” “the rights of small nations,” “the principle of self-determination,” etc. In such a world atmosphere as this, it would

have been altogether strange if India had not been affected. The days are past when in Kipling's phrase India "heard the legions thundering by, and then plunged to sleep again." She is now sensitive to all the currents of the world's activities and the world's thought.

Quite likely the outburst in the Punjab will clear the air and prepare the way for a steady constitutional growth in the direction of "responsible government." It may be that the very announcement of the 20th of August, 1917, in which the policy of Parliament was declared to be the gradual realization of responsible government for India, was interpreted by many Indians as a sign of weakness. Government has corrected any such wrong impression by her stern treatment of the recent rioters.

A significant change of allegiance may be mentioned as prophetic, possibly, of a new attitude toward the British Empire. For the last ten years or more Har Dayal, M.A., has been practically the head of the revolutionary movement against British rule in India. In letters written recently to "India" and the "New Statesman" (Pioneer, April 27th and 30th), he announces his change of attitude. He writes: "I have now formally severed my connection with the Indian revolutionists on the Continent. I am happy to be in a position to work as a free, honest man and a loyal British subject again" (January 31, 1919). The reasons for this change are given as follows: "I now believe that the consolidation of the British Empire in the East is necessary to the best interests of the people of India, Burma, Egypt and Mesopotamia. The break up of the British Empire in Asia would lead only to a change of masters of the people of India and Egypt. British and French imperialism in its worst form is a thousand

times preferable to German or Japanese imperialism." Har Dayal spent two years (1915-1916) in Berlin. Doubtless during this time he was compelled to picture India under Prussian rule as a grim possibility. So he closes one of the articles with the words: "Let us not jump out of the frying pan of British imperialism into the fire of—who knows what."

The recent riots in India have undoubtedly been more serious than any occurrences since the Mutiny of 1857. The air, we may hope, has been cleared by the explosion. We may count with some confidence on a steady constitutional progress toward the goal of "responsible government," steady progress in industrial development (so sorely needed), and rapid progress in the Christianization of India. India is now, as perhaps never before, in the melting pot. She needs sympathy, comradeship, and sacrificial service. Probably there will be a new era of Christian progress in India, very much as there was in China after the Boxer movement. At such a time as this the Christian college is invaluable as a means of preparing a wise and sane leadership for India. Says Rev. E. D. Lucas, M.A., Principal of the Forman Christian College, Lahore: "The need for strong missionary colleges to influence and guide these impressionable students was never greater than to-day." It is a time then to devise large things. The Christian Church in India and Christian missions from abroad have a stupendous work to do in helping morally and spiritually to prepare the Indian people for the task of self-government within the British Empire, which work can be fully accomplished only as they are prepared for citizenship within the Kingdom of God.

H. D. GRISWOLD,
Lahore.

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